

## The Grants Office and the RA Generalist: Parallel Life-Cycles and Development at Small PUIs

Amy Cubel-Schuckers, CRA, GPC  
Franklin & Marshall College

Cara Martin-Tetreault  
Bowdoin College

Carol Withers, MPA, CRA  
University of New Haven

**Abstract:** *If you are a grants or research administrator working at a small predominantly undergraduate institution, have you ever wondered where you stand in relation to other similar institutions? Have you thought about what you need to do to get yourself, your office, and your institution to the “next level” of outreach to or support for the faculty? Have you asked what are reasonable benchmarks or milestones to which you can aspire in leading your office?*

*In this article the authors focus on two parallel cycles of development within a small grants office at a predominantly or primarily undergraduate institution (PUI). One cycle is the development of the office itself as it is shaped by the institution, faculty research activity, and intramural and extramural funding priorities. The second cycle is the development of the research administrator as the professional grows and matures. The authors will walk the reader through the phases of development as they are influenced by challenges and milestones characteristic of successful research development.*

**Keywords:** *Challenges, Grants Administrator, Life-cycle, Milestones, Predominantly Undergraduate Institution, PUI, RA Generalist, Research Administrator, Research Administration Generalist, Small PUIs*

### Introduction

The authors attempt to address a gap that researchers Derrick and Nickson (2014) identified. Derrick and Nickson suggest that future research on how “research management teams” differ “between universities and other research organizations” (p. 34) should empirically analyze characteristics of successful research management, identify those strategies and structures that are deemed successful, and highlight how they might vary between different types of institutions. As a first step towards an empirical understanding, we attempt to define and then frame this discussion from the perspectives of grants or research administrators at small PUIs. Such research administrators may have more than one role, may be operating as a “one-person shop” or as part of a small team, and may have a reporting line, or lines, that typically range somewhere between the Advancement/Development office and the Provost’s/Academic Affairs office.

The primary audience for this article is grants administrators at some of the smallest, often private, PUIs. The article may also be of interest to research administrators at PUIs supported by research foundations, or PUIs that are large enough to have both a central office and departmental structure. Additionally, research administrators at large R1 institutions with a desire to support PUIs in their geographic area may find this article of interest.

## Definitions

Because individuals at PUI institutions who oversee grant-related activities or who make hiring decisions at such PUIs are often unfamiliar with the “research administrator” (RA) terminology, the terms “grants administrator” and “research administrator” will be used synonymously, recognizing there are some limitations to this equivalence.

Additionally, although there may be other definitions, for the purposes of this article the authors will define PUI institutions using the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) definition: those “that award Associate’s degrees, Bachelor’s degrees, and/or Master’s degrees in NSF-supported fields, but have awarded 20 or fewer Ph.D. /D. Sci. degrees in all NSF-supported fields during the combined previous two academic years” (2014, para. 7). The breadth of the NSF PUI definition, however, allows this category to include not only those institutions that have undergraduate only enrollments, but also institutions with quite sizeable undergraduate populations, institutions that also award applied doctorates (e.g. EdD, DSW), or have a sizable Master’s degree program, and institutions that may be part of a larger state-supported system with access to resources from a central grants office or research foundation.

Therefore, while not intending to be definitive, the focus of this discussion is on small PUIs. We define small PUIs as institutions with an undergraduate enrollment of 3,000 or less, that are independent, and that do not have the research administration benefits, resources, and structures available from central offices off-site. We further frame small PUIs as institutions that have a strong research-oriented and grant-active faculty and staff.

These smallest institutions, quite often private, also generally have a strong complement of both faculty research and institutional grants sourced from public and private funders. This means that grants at small PUIs may be organized through a Sponsored Research Office (SRO) under the Provost’s Office/Academic Affairs division, through a Corporate and Foundation Relations (CFR) office under the Advancement/Development division, or through some combination of the two. The nature or title of these offices vary and may be called offices of sponsored research or sponsored programs, CFR office, college grants, or simply the grants office.

As the title of this article suggests, the focus of this discussion is on the foundational understanding that grants-related structures at small PUIs have the strong possibility of, and often clear need for, growth and change. Regardless of an institution’s annual volume of grants or size of awards, if an institution receives federal money, that institution is required to comply with all applicable federal rules and regulations.

## Background and Expertise

We base our findings on the authors' own experiences at PUIs with varied types of research administration structures. Each author is currently working at a small PUI that generally fits the profile described above.

**Amy Cubel-Schuckers** started her career in research administration as an assistant grant writer at a community action agency in western New York State, and subsequently worked first as an institutional grant writer and then as a grants development specialist at a public PUI (approximately 5,000 undergraduates, with about 500 Masters students). The Office of Sponsored Programs there was supported by a state-level research foundation, which operated in some ways as a central office. While at that public PUI, the pre-award operations were integrated into a "life-cycle" model encompassing both pre- and post-award operations with four staff members. The author earned Certified Research Administrator (CRA) and Grant Professional Certified (GPC) certifications in that context. In 2012 she transitioned to Franklin & Marshall College (F&M), a private completely undergraduate national liberal arts college (approximately 2,200 undergraduates) as the Director of Faculty Grants. At F&M, she supported the integration of a newly merged institutional (Foundation and Corporate Relations) and faculty grants pre-award team resulting in the Office of College Grants with reporting lines into two divisions. Post-award matters were handled by the institution's finance department. The Office of College Grants continues as a blended office and is currently undergoing a second level transformation into a co-located life-cycle model, with reporting lines into three divisions: Office of the Provost; the Office of College Advancement; and Finance and Administration. As part of that transformation, she has been promoted to the Director of Faculty Grants and Compliance Resourcing.

**Cara Martin-Tetreault** started her career working as a Development Officer for two small not-for-profit organizations in Maine before specializing as a Grants Officer at Bowdoin College, a small, private, predominately undergraduate institution (1,790 students). Hired as the Assistant Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations and reporting to the Senior Vice President for Advancement, the 2 ½ person office was charged with the management of all pre-award and stewardship for external grants from private and public granting organizations. A dedicated grants manager based in the "business office" was and remains responsible for post-award financial responsibilities. In 2011, in response to the growing complexity of grants administration and compliance, the College supported a new Office of Sponsored Research Programs, based in the academic dean's division, dedicated to faculty research grant support and research compliance. In addition, the Office of Corporate and Foundation Relations was also moved to Academic Affairs so that the "grants office" is currently staffed by a Director of Sponsored Research, a Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, and an Assistant Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations.

**Carol Withers** started at a large public institution, which grew in size, volume of grant activity, and reclassification into the R1 category during her time there. She worked in several smaller academic departments, with responsibilities for both grant-related projects and other academic areas. The title of research administrator and the concept of training and careers in research administration was still relatively new, but working with faculty on pre- and post-award issues gave her a balanced

perspective on the continuum of service that has proved valuable. Access to professionals with many years of experience in the field was invaluable as she learned the process. However, the non-grant responsibilities were equally valuable. Those roles gave her a holistic perspective of grants within the larger institutional structure of higher education, the demands on faculty for teaching, publications, and being awarded tenure, as well as an understanding of curricular issues, and the organization of events and workshops. At PUIs where the faculty mentor structure may be undeveloped or underdeveloped, it is important that one can speak the language of faculty and administrators and address the needs of a broad constituency. She earned her CRA, thanks in part to the well-developed support system that was available at a larger research institution.

Carol left to start a full-time grants office at a private PUI, and is now in her sixth year at the University of New Haven. Without the prior experience, it would have been very difficult to know where to start. Even with the experience, it was a bit daunting to be the only person, with the exception of the accountant in the Finance Office, responsible for an entire campus with four colleges that was just starting to transition from a primarily teaching university to a teacher-scholar model.

## Methodology

The experiences in these various PUI settings positioned the authors to develop a life-cycle framework within which they could begin to assess the extent to which research administration at small PUI institutions meet certain marks of maturity. Additionally, a similar framework was used to assess individual development as research administrators.

The authors' personal experiences on this topic were complemented by discussion groups at a session held during the NCURA Region 1 Spring Meeting 2015 in Portland, Maine. The following questions were asked of discussion group participants and co-discussants:

- What institutional infrastructure needs to be in place, or developed, in order to have a functioning and effective grants office?
- As challenges are addressed, what new issues lie ahead? Can challenges be anticipated?
- How does one know when one has "arrived" relative to institutional structures? Is there a defining moment, a gradual realization, or is it an ongoing continuum where some components are reached, but challenges continue to emerge that keep grants or research administrators in crisis management mode?
- How does one measure and celebrate success?
- What part does the professional maturation of the person or person(s) in the grants administrator(s) role play relative to these institutional concerns?

Contemporaneous notes were taken by discussion facilitators for each group. Discussion facilitators were subsequently contacted for more in depth responses and clarification of notes. These notes and responses were then integrated into our life-cycle of a PUI analysis described as follows.

## **The Grants or Research Administration Generalist**

Some of the reasons that research administrators might be drawn to working at a small PUI may include a sense of accomplishment or empowerment, a feeling of having an impact on the campus, the ability to respond quickly to a changing environment, engagement with faculty, or simply the opportunity to break into a new industry.

Regardless of how a grants or research administrator “gets to” a small PUI, the reality is that the individual in a one- or few-person shop is responsible for the same variety of work as teams of individuals who collectively manage the research enterprise at larger institutions. Despite this reality, it is unlikely that the RA or grants administrator at a PUI will have access to in-house legal counsel, an export control officer, or an Intellectual Property or Tech Transfer office. At small PUIs it is also unlikely for there to be stand-alone research compliance operations or other administrators on campus with significant research administration knowledge or experience.

Therefore, the RA or grants administrator at a small PUI must be a generalist who understands the “soup-to-nuts” process of identifying, applying for, negotiating, managing, and closing out an award. The RA generalist may be responsible for providing research support across a range of disciplines and a variety of sponsors, and must know the requirements for each funder and their submission processes. Further, the RA generalist must understand the rules and regulations around grant administration, research compliance, fiscal compliance, and the need for appropriate policies and procedures at his or her institution, which meet the inter-institutional test of “reasonable, allowable, allocable, and consistent.”

Since the RA generalist commonly is the person who knows the most about research administration at his/her institution, s/he often has the lonely and sometimes difficult path as a middle administrator to communicate to institutional administrators both the impact and the risks to the institution of ongoing changes in government regulations. The RA generalist is in a position to lead from the middle (Nickerson, 2014; Robinson, 2010), who needs to have the support and encouragement to communicate to peers and to more senior administrators in the academic and financial/business office sector. Most importantly, the RA generalist needs to keep abreast of changes in the field, thereby necessitating regular and ongoing professional development.

Individuals familiar with grant writing or grants administration in public sectors who are new to research administration within higher education face a steep learning curve to understand the depth and breadth of the field. Those doing the hiring for grants administrators at small PUIs often have an insufficient understanding of the nature of the field and the requisite training necessary to get a new RA generalist well situated in a new role. The institutional focus may be on potential revenues, without a full understanding of the true costs associated with securing and administering grants and a compliant research infrastructure, the time needed to move new faculty from the pipeline to successful awards, and the increasing level of competition for a relatively stable amount of funds from external sponsors.

## Grant Office Realities at Small PUIs

The proposed institutional “Life-Cycle” model for small PUIs may be used irrespective of the level of expertise or experience of the research or grants administrator. The model reflects the increasing maturity or sophistication of grants office structures, types, or phases: start-up, developing/expanding, transitional, mature, and disrupted. The model also incorporates an issue not typically encountered at larger institutions: the intermingling of the sponsored research office (SRO) role and the corporate and foundation relations (CFR) role, which the authors term a “blended” office. Finally, the Life-Cycle model incorporates the interplay between the types of offices and the experience level of the RA generalist(s) who may work in these offices. We discuss the phases of the RA generalist at the end of this section.

The titles below reflect general characteristics as the grants office evolves. However, the process is a continuum and, as noted elsewhere, offices may develop at different rates for various milestones.

### *1) The Start-up Office*

Start-up offices are characterized by a lack of internal expertise and support and face the challenge of knowing where to begin. There is often a need to develop and nurture a grant culture. Prospective grant seekers may be faculty members, professional staff members, or administrators. The purpose of a grant may tie to an individual faculty member’s research, but in a “start-up” situation it may as often tie to service, student support, or community outreach. Start-ups additionally may be characterized as having little institutionalization of key components of a grants operation such as written policies and procedures, clear authorization structures, or consistent budgeting rates.

Challenges for start-up offices may include foundational issues such as setting up the office space, creating a web page, developing other forms of communication with faculty and staff, and negotiating F&A agreements if they are not already in place. Additionally, staff in start-up offices are responsible for creating an initial infrastructure for everything from filing systems, data tracking, and reports, to getting registered for the various sponsor portals.

It may take time to convince faculty of the value of working with an RA and working within the system. For institutions that emphasize teaching, RAs may find resistance on the part of senior faculty, who had not been expected to submit proposals or seek significant external funding. Senior faculty who have not been grant-active may also find it challenging late in their careers to be motivated to write for external funding. This also may impact newly hired enthusiastic researchers, who are not encouraged by senior colleagues—those who will ultimately vote on their promotion and tenure.

The challenges, of course, will depend on the strength of the existing infrastructure, the level of research already being conducted by faculty and the value the institution places on research, and whether there are already substantial policies and procedures in place that may need only minor modifications in order to be sponsor compliant.

Milestones may include: 1) setting up systems for regularly sharing information about funders and funding opportunities (NCURA Standards, 2014), and for sharing information among or between key offices; 2) building relationships with peer mid-level administrators around a task-analysis “who does what” focus; 3) creation of a “routing sheet” that documents key individuals’ knowledge of and permission to submit proposals (NCURA Standards, 2014); 4) development of a filing system for submitted grants; and 5) submission of a proposal for a first-time applicant (NCURA Standards, 2014).

## ***2) The Developing or Expanding Office***

Developing/expanding offices have procedures in relation to the grants process, and some written policies and procedures in place, but annual updating in order to reflect the changing standards will be required as federal regulations or political administrations change. Developing offices may be in the position where demand for services outstrips available resources. For example, a handful of faculty members may have external funding to support their research, but express dissatisfaction with the ways in which they have to interact with the campus business office.

Communication with other offices, or lack thereof, may point to gaps in relationships between offices. There may be gaps in project management support, which might show up when developing a project, when faculty feel the need to take on responsibilities that they feel should be handled by grants staff, or when a process breaks down leading to project development fizzle.

There may also be attempts at back-office “deals” wherein grant proposers seek informal ways to circumvent or work around institutional fringe benefit or indirect cost rates. Upper level administrators may inadvertently buy into a deal-making culture from the perspective of wanting to keep prospective grant seekers happy, or from a lack of knowledge as to how such “deals” undercut consistent policies and procedures and create institutional risk. Developing/expanding offices are beginning to realize that “compliance” refers not only to fiscal compliance, but to an entire suite of obligations that range from the principal investigator (PI) to the institutional level.

Challenges for developing/expanding offices may include a need for more resources sooner than anticipated or before significant award successes can be demonstrated, getting grant seekers to look beyond their traditional comfort zones or moving beyond discouragement when initial attempts are not successful, especially for faculty who are highly competent and not necessarily tolerant of rejection. There may need to be both top/down and bottom/up efforts to break down barriers between departments, to create an understanding that “grant” problems are institutional issues to be resolved.

The potential move from an indirect cost agreement based on salaries and wages to a modified total direct cost may provoke disagreement or an expansion of the infrastructure in areas outside of the sponsored program office.

Milestones may reflect the increasing professionalization of operations. These could include: 1) the establishment of metrics relative to desired outcomes, e.g. number of submissions, rate of success, resubmissions and their success rates; 2) a broadening of participation among the pool of grant seekers, such as whether new or different faculty are applying and an expansion of the



departments from which proposals are submitted; 3) a broadening of the sponsor base rather than dependence on one or two key funders; and 4) the identification of gaps at the operational level, and the beginning of the formation of a plan to address these gaps (Lintz, 2008).

### ***3) The Transitional Office***

We use the term transitional to refer to the increasing maturation of a grants office, while recognizing that this office is “not there yet.” That is, transitional offices are further along in their sophistication relative to overall grants operation than developing offices, but could not be characterized as “mature.”

Transitional offices may see that compliance, development of policy, and procedural issues take up an increasing amount of time. Issues of risk analysis are brought to the fore through this process. For example, if institutional policies and procedures consistent with federal requirements are not in written form, they “do not exist” from an auditor’s perspective, thereby engendering risk to the institution. Needs for principal investigator (PI) or project director (PD) training in project management, both fiscal and programmatic, are seen as important for successful implementation. Training for non-grant staff, including administrators and staff working on grants accounting in a Business Office setting, is identified as an additional need. Conversations may begin about targeted use of indirect cost (IDC) recovery monies as an additional means to support and/or incentivize research-related activities.

Challenges may include providing the level of support that grant seekers have come to expect while addressing infrastructure issues. Challenges from previous stages that have not been fully resolved take on greater importance with increased volume. RAs may be asked to take on more roles within the institution and may have less time to devote to professional development to prepare for those roles. The one- or few-person generalist shop may need to grow to include specialist knowledge. If the staffing of the office has not grown since its inception, the RA(s) may begin to feel the need to move on to an institution offering more advancement opportunities, since opportunities for internal promotion may be extremely limited.

Milestones for transitional offices may include: 1) compliance policies that are developing or in place (NCURA Standards, 2014); 2) training and other support mechanisms that have been developed and are in use for PIs and PDs; 3) training that is seen as a priority both for grants staff, as well as for staff in offices, such as business offices, that handle grant-related expenditures; and 4) a grant culture that is well-established across the institution (Lintz, 2008).

### ***4) The Mature Office***

As the category title suggests, the structure of a mature office has moved beyond personalities to established structures that are institutionalized. Written policies and procedures are in place, and are reviewed and updated according to an established schedule. Structures for sustainability and viability are active including standard operating procedures (SOPs) for key activities. The institution is successful at retaining key personnel, and could withstand a change in personnel because of the institutionalization of policies, procedures, and practices. Conversation at this level may shift from “Wouldn’t it be great to grow the number of externally funded projects?” to



“Exactly HOW are we going to manage the growth we’ve already seen, and how can we sustain more such growth in the future?”

Challenges include retaining key personnel since, regardless of planning, owing to the size of operations at small PUIs, loss of a key person would still be disruptive. Since success breeds success, increased workload from accomplishments may make it difficult to sustain forward progress. Small institutions may have periodic turnover, so maintaining training levels in other divisions, e.g. in the financial or business office, may be difficult. A small operation makes it difficult to develop and sustain a system of internal controls, particularly for non-fiscal operations.

Milestones may include: 1) engagement in and embedding of the sponsored research operation in the campus strategic plan; 2) a campus culture of grant engagement; 3) a successful peer review process for proposals; 4) mentors for junior faculty; 5) administrative support for PIs at every stage of the grant cycle; 6) policies and processes that support institutional needs and goals (Chun, 2010); 7) reporting tools development; 8) grant reporting structures match institutional needs, and the academic, financial, and institutional advancement divisions share the same vision and goals for grants on campus; 9) organizational structures meet both PI and administrative needs and address pre- and post-award, as well as financial and non-financial functions; 10) indirect cost recovery use policy, based on strategic reflection, directs IDC returns to the operational fund for general use by the institution and/or to more specific research-related use; and 11) a grants-related advisory board drawn from across the institution helps the institution reflect on the important role of sponsored research/programs to the accomplishment of its goals (Cole, 2010; Lintz, 2008; Drummond, 2003; NCURA Standards, 2014).

### ***5) The Disrupted Office***

We include a category of grants offices that have been disrupted to reflect times of retrenchment, reorganization, or turnover of key personnel, which can cause significant setbacks but, if handled judiciously, can result in a stronger infrastructure. Retrenchment may result from fiscal stress at the institutional level, or reorganization, but still may provide opportunities for forward progress. Disruption can occur at any time during the life-cycle and may occur more than one time. Because of size, institutions that have larger numbers of research administrators may be less prone to disruption as discussed here.

Small PUIs are especially prone to disruption by the loss of a key person, particularly if staffing for a PUI’s grant operation consists of a one-person shop led by a RA generalist. Such disruption would impact the institution regardless of whether a PUI’s grants operation has reached the mature level or is a start-up; the impact of the loss of such a key person can be significant.

Challenges for a disrupted office include: 1) maintaining institutional knowledge; 2) preserving expertise; 3) maintaining momentum during time of resource constraint; 4) finding time to do evaluations and implement results of evaluations; and 5) if the disruption is a retrenchment resulting in a decrease in staff support, the challenge would be getting all the work done, and ensuring that an institution remains “compliant.”

Milestones for disrupted offices may vary depending on the source of the disruption. For example, a change in staff person may provide an opportunity to re-think the office structure or positioning. If the disruption involves combining separate CFR and SRO functions, developing a single set of procedures while maintaining support for projects in progress would be important. Conversely, if a combined CFR/SRO office is separating, maintaining relations among personnel and maintaining a consistent, if not a single, set of procedures would be an institutionally sound measure to take.

### ***“Blended” Offices***

While not exclusive to small PUIs, “blended” offices are not as common at larger institutions. Blended offices typically involve personnel, or one person, responsible for both CFR and SRO responsibilities located in one office, often under the direction of a single division. Blended offices may follow different timelines and have different priorities, sometimes depending on where the office is positioned—under Provost’s Office/Academic Affairs or under Advancement/Development.

Challenges for blended offices relate to answers to questions such as: Is there a single or are there multiple reporting lines? If multiple reporting lines exist, how are differences in perspective handled, and how are these differences prioritized? How is funding for the office handled? What are the potential advantages or disadvantages of placement in Advancement/Development or in the Provost’s Office/Academic Affairs areas relative to the ability of the RA generalist to fulfill both the CFR and SRO roles?

Milestones for blended offices may include: 1) development of objectives that meet both Advancement/Development and Academic Affairs needs; 2) regular and ongoing reporting meetings with upper-level administrators; 3) secure funding from each reporting line; and 4) clear inclusion of the objectives of the blended office in the strategic plans of each division.

### **The RA Generalist Life-Cycle or Development Phases**

A parallel life-cycle that impacts the organization’s progress is the RA generalist’s own professional and occupational development, which we only address briefly here. Professional development is defined as those opportunities to improve or learn general skills such as software, project management, or communication skills. Occupational development is defined as those opportunities to learn the new and emerging guidance and regulations specific to the day-to-day function of the job, such as workshops on Uniform Guidance, Federal Program updates, or IRB Common Rule changes. We labeled the RA generalist development phases as: 1) Novice (new to RA field and/or higher education); 2) Developing (approximately 3-5 years of experience); 3) Transitional (moved to a new institution or to a new role, e.g. CFR/Advancement to Sponsored Programs); and 4) Experienced.

Challenges from the institutional perspective are tied to answers to the following questions: Did the RA generalist work at another institution in a similar capacity, or is the person new to grants/

research administration? If the person has had experience with grants, was that work in a higher education setting, or in a different non-profit context? Does the person have formal training in research administration, or did they learn about RA on-the-job?

At the campus level, questions to ask include: Could other employees serve as mentors or must the RA generalist engage in a discovery process for each new task? Is the RA generalist role seen by the institution as a simple administrative cog, or is there evidence that the institution recognizes the RA role as a stand-alone profession to which a body of knowledge, skills, and experience is attributed? To what extent is the institution supportive of professional or occupational development activities?

Milestones may include: 1) development of a training plan to increase competencies; 2) use of attendance at professional or occupational development conferences to complete certificate programs; 3) expansion of networking with similarly situated professionals to increase knowledge (Chun, 2010; NCURA Standards, 2014); 4) use of credentialing organizations to earn certifications (e.g. Certified Research Administrator [CRA], Certified Pre-award Research Administrator [CPRA], Certified Financial Research Administrator [CFRA], Grant Professional Certified [GPC]); 5) enrollment in Master's degree programs in research or public administration; 6) contribution to the field through workshop, session, or poster presentations at regional or national meetings, or as article authors; and 7) contribution to the field through service at the regional or national levels as conference organizers, hosts, journal or magazine editors, or association board or committee members.

## Conclusions

While it may be possible to articulate points along a continuum, there are no absolute fixed phases with a linear progression for all elements encompassed within grants offices. Instead, progress in some areas may advance quickly while other areas may lag behind. The Disrupted Phase may push an organization back or, as a result of careful management of the process, may help advance an office to a higher level. The way in which the CFR and the SRO roles and responsibilities are handled vary widely at small PUIs, and are an additional complication to the life-cycle of a grants office. Further, the role and capability of the RA generalist in a PUI institution certainly plays a part in the nature and pace of the development of grants or research administration. Thus, institutional administrators need to be aware of the need for foundational and ongoing professional development (Chun, 2010) so that an institution can both recruit and retain individuals seeking employment in research administration at small undergraduate institutions.

It is the authors' intention that this discussion plants a seed for future dialogue that should be continued for the purposes of strategic planning at small PUI institutions with existing grant or research administration operations, or at small PUIs that anticipate creating a sponsored programs office. Hiring a research or grants administrator is only one step and needs to be seen in the context of a larger and longer-term commitment in order to realize the full benefit of the resources that a grants or research administration office can provide.

## Follow-up Activities and Directions for Future Research

The next anticipated step is a survey to obtain data on the demographics of research administrators in small PUIs, their backgrounds and experience levels. Additional presentations at professional conferences will enable the authors to expand the scope of the project and, with others, better refine the needs of the PUI RA generalist community.

Work on how an institution can manage and manages through a disruption process for a better outcome than it had prior to the disruption is an additional area of interest, which might initially be investigated through a case studies approach.

## Authors' Notes

The authors would like express their thanks to the participants of the May 2015 NCURA Region 1 Life-cycle of a PUI discussion session. We would like to offer our particular gratitude to Frances (Franci) Vinal Farnsworth of Middlebury College, Susan Elvin-Cooper of Bard College, and Penny J. Miceli, PhD, CRA, of Keene State College who helped us review our notes from that NCURA Region 1 session and who reviewed several early drafts of our manuscript. The responsibility for the content of this article, however, rests with the authors.

PowerPoint slides from the May 2015 NCURA Regional presentation are available upon request from the authors.

### **Amy Cuhel-Schuckers, CRA, GPC**

Director of Faculty Grants and Compliance Resourcing

Franklin & Marshall College

PO Box 3003

Office of College Grants

Lancaster, PA 17604-3003 United States of America

Telephone: (717) 358-4697

Fax: (717) 358-4602

acuhelsc@fandm.edu

*Amy Cuhel-Schuckers*, CRA, GPC, is an “experienced RA in a transitional setting within a blended office” as the Director of Faculty Grants and Compliance Resourcing in the Office of College Grants at Franklin & Marshall College. She supports faculty in the development of external funding proposals and has been working to strengthen overall grant-related operations. Amy is a member of NCURA, SRA, GPA, and CLASP, serves on SRA's *Journal of Research Administration* editorial board, and is a member of the CLASP List Advisory Group. She may be reached at acuhelsc@fandm.edu.

**Cara Martin-Tetreault**

Director of Sponsored Research Programs  
Bowdoin College

*Cara Martin-Tetreault* is an “experienced RA in a transitional setting” as the Director of Sponsored Research Programs at Bowdoin College, where her responsibilities include faculty development, proposal development, research support, and non-financial grants compliance. She is an active member and volunteer of NCURA and CLASP. She may be reached at [cmartin3@bowdoin.edu](mailto:cmartin3@bowdoin.edu).

**Carol Withers, MPA, CRA**

Director of Grants and Sponsored Programs  
University of New Haven

*Carol Withers*, MPA, CRA, Director of Grants and Sponsored Programs at the University of New Haven, West Haven, CT, is an “experienced RA in an expanding transitional” PUI. She is a member of NCURA, SRA, and CLASP. Her responsibilities include faculty support for identification, development, and submission of proposals and non-financial post-award collaborations. Her roles, like many research administrators, include matchmaker, coach, taskmaster, networker, trainer, collaborator, and consoler. She may be reached at [cwithers@newhaven.edu](mailto:cwithers@newhaven.edu).

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Amy Cuhel-Schuckers, Director of Faculty Grants and Compliance Resourcing, Franklin & Marshall College, PO Box 3003, Office of College Grants, Lancaster, PA, 17604-3003, United States of America, [acuhelsc@fandm.edu](mailto:acuhelsc@fandm.edu).

## References

- Chun, M. B. J. (2010). Building a research administration infrastructure at the department level. *Journal of Research Administration*, 41(3): 77-84.
- Cole, S. S. (2010). Reframing research administration. *Journal of Research Administration*, 41(1): 11-21.
- Derrick, G., & Nickson, A. (2014). Invisible intermediaries: A systematic review into the role of research management in university and institutional research processes. *Journal of Research Administration*, 45(2), 11-36.
- Drummond, C. N. (2003) Strategic planning for research administration. *Journal of Research Administration*, 34(2) : 4-10.
- Lintz, E. M. (2008). A conceptual framework for the future of successful research administration. *Journal of Research Administration*, 39(2): 68-80.
- National Council for University Research Administrators (NCURA). (2014). National standards for effective sponsored program operations. Retrieved from [www.ncura.edu/InstitutionalPrograms.aspx](http://www.ncura.edu/InstitutionalPrograms.aspx)
- National Science Foundation. (2014). *Facilitating research at primarily undergraduate institutions*. NSF 14-579. Retrieved from [https://www.nsf.gov/mobile/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=5518](https://www.nsf.gov/mobile/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5518)
- Nickerson, J. (2014). *Leading change from the middle: A practical guide to building extraordinary capabilities*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Robinson, W. P. (2010). *Leading people from the middle: The universal mission of heart and mind*. New York: iUniverse.